

Sunday, June 2, 2013—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 105 The First Articulation of the Mid-Acts Position

### **Towards Mid-Acts Period**

*Bible Study for Bereans (April through June, 1937)*

- These three issues of *Bible Study for Bereans* cover no new ground dispensationally. There is nothing in these editions that we have not already observed in our comments on previous editions. For the sake of brevity, please consider the following summary of these three issues.
  - April, 1937—this edition is taken up with a dispensational discussion of eschatology. Pastors O’Hair and Baker write about the second coming of Christ, the judgment seat of Christ, and the Rapture of the church and other related subjects.
  - May, 1937—contains answers to twenty seven questions on a variety of theological subjects. Some examples include: “What is the Day of the Lord?”, “Is Divorce Scriptural?”, and “What is Baptism for the Dead?” All the articles appear to have been written by Pastor O’Hair.
  - June, 1937—is dominated by an article by J. C. O’Hair titled, “A Comparative Study of the Four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the Light of Pauline Truth.” A short essay titled, “Did the Lord Change His Mind Concerning the Great Commission,” rounds out the June, 1937 edition of the magazine.

*Bible Study for Bereans (July, 1937)*

- The July, 1937 issue was the last edition of the magazine to be published. The inside cover contains a letter from Pastor O’Hair addressed to Dear Christian Friends that states the following:
  - “As we have already announced, with this issue of Bible Study for Bereans, we are discontinuing the publication, at least, temporarily. We are so pressed for time on account of our Radio schedule and the Radio mail, that the pastor cannot stand the heavy strain. However, we will make announcements over the radio, and send printed notices, as to other messages which we will be printing from time to time.”
- This final issue is titled, “The Epistle to the Galatians: A Verse by Verse Study.” As the title suggests, this edition of the magazine serves as a mini-commentary on the book of Galatians. It contains both an introduction as well as verse by verse comments on the entire book of Galatians.
- In the introduction, prior to his verse by verse comments on the text of Galatians, O’Hair comes the closest to date in terms of outlining a truly mid-Acts position on the beginning of the body of Christ.

- “Paul was the special ambassador of Christ with a message for the nations (the world). To him was committed the gospel of the uncircumcision and the ministry of reconciliation. This is a message showing the Old Man and the New Man, man’s identification with Adam, the first man, by natural birth; and his identification with Christ by the supernatural birth, or rather, by the new creation. Wherever reconciliation is taught in the Bible, the new creation is taught and the new creature’s identification with the Lord Jesus Christ, dead, buried, risen and seated. We find nothing of the new creation in the Gospel Records of Christ’s earthly ministry or the “Acts” ministry of the Twelve. During his earthly ministry very few understood the new birth. Perhaps we do not now fully understand the meaning of II Corinthians 5:16 “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

Let us approach the study of Galatians with the assurance that Paul received his authority, message and ministry from Christ in heaven and not from the Twelve. Paul confirmed many of the truths which the Twelve preached to Israel, but he did not continue with Gentiles the spiritual program which Christ instructed the Twelve to present to Israel.

Paul, an apostle, by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is called the Apostle and High Priest of our profession. Hebrews 3:1. Christ said to those who were apostles before Paul, “As My Father hath sent Me, so send I you.” John 20:21. An apostle is “one sent”. Christ is the “Sent One”, about forty times in the Gospel of John. Paul was not one of the Twelve. Matthias was God’s choice to succeed Judas. Acts 1:25. I Corinthians 15:8 and 5. This is the only case of apostolic succession. Peter occupies a very prominent place in the first half of the Book of Acts; but he is not mentioned after the Jerusalem Council. Acts 15:13 to 30. In the last half of the Book of Acts Paul is the principal human actor. In Acts, Chapters 13 to 28, we have the record of Paul and those who have dealings with him. In the Book of Acts he is called “Saul” twenty-three times; “Paul” one hundred and thirty-two times. . .

In the early part of Paul’s first missionary journey, out of Antioch of Syria, his name was changed from Saul to Paul. Acts 13:8 to 11. This happened at the time he met a Roman Gentile in company with a Jew with a good name (Bar-jesus); who was not true to his name. “Barjesus” means “the child of Jehovah Saviour.” But Bar-jesus was a false prophet. He not only rejected Saul’s message concerning Jesus, but did his utmost to keep Paulus, the Roman, from hearing and receiving the Word. Note Acts 13:12 why Paulus believed: “Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” Paulus believed because of Bar-jesus’ unbelief and blindness. Israel was Bar-jesus, the child of Jehovah. Paul turned to the Gentiles because Israel put the message from them. Because of Israel’s unbelief and blindness, salvation was sent to Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy. Gentiles obtained mercy through Israel’s unbelief.

Saul became Paul. He was born out of due season. I Corinthians 15:8. Paul was not a convert of the Twelve Apostles. Neither did he receive from them his authority to preach the gospel, which he received by revelation from Christ in heaven.

Apostles were called apostles of Christ. Paul could never have qualified as an apostle according to Acts 1:21 and 22. He received a special call.”

- Toward the end of his comments on the text of Galatians, Pastor O’Hair states the following regarding the dispensational significance of Acts 28:28. It was not the beginning of a new and different body but a change in the spiritual program for the same body.
  - “The great change came with Paul’s quotation of Isaiah in Acts 28:25 to 28. These words mark a radical change in God’s dealings with Israel and His spiritual program for the Body of Christ. The change was not to a different Body of Christ, but to a change in the spiritual program for the same Body. As “the times of the Gentiles,” politically, began with Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Jerusalem about 600 B.C., (read the last chapters of II Kings and Jeremiah). “the times of the Gentiles,” spiritually, began after Acts 28:28. God’s order since that time has not been “to the Jew first,” as it was during the “Acts” period. The Nation Israel was not set aside at the time Christ spoke the words of Matthew 23:31 to 39; but when Paul spoke the words of Acts 28:25 to 28.

Those who tried to force circumcision upon Gentiles, saved by Paul’s message of Grace, were completely out of the will of God. Those who insist today upon giving Israel’s seventh-day sabbath to members of the Body of Christ are out of the will of God.

Let us bear in mind that God, by the work of Christ on the cross, broke down the middle wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles and took out of the way the handwriting of ordinances. This truth was not immediately revealed to the twelve apostles; therefore is not taught in the early chapters of Acts which tells of the attitude of the Twelve toward the law about seven years after Pentecost: “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” Acts 10:28. Now Peter was able to say: “And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” Acts 15:9. Thus we see that the dispensation of the mystery did not begin with Pentecost. Ephesians 3:9.

Now let us again read Galatians 2:9, “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.”

Two of the greatest blunders that believers make, in an endeavor to rightly divide the word of truth is; first, to fail to note the difference between the relation of uncircumcised believing Gentiles to Abram and circumcised believers to Abraham; and, second; to teach

that Paul went to the Gentiles under the same commission given the Twelve and with their same message.”

- With the publication of the final issue of *Bible Study for Bereans*, our month to month window into the thinking of J. C. O’Hair is shut. During the two years covered by the magazine (August, 1935 through July, 1937) we have observed three distinct periods in O’Hair’s thought development: 1) Towards Acts 28 (August, 1935 through December, 1935); 2) Anti-Acts 2 Anti-Acts 28 (January, 1936 through June, 1936); and 3) Towards Mid-Acts (July, 1936 through July, 1937). It is important to note that as we concluded our analysis of *Bible Studies for Bereans* and, as of July, 1937 at the conclusion of the magazine, clear Mid-Acts statements have thus far eluded us.

### Mid-Acts Period

- The last edition of *Bible Study for Bereans* (July, 1937) contains a listing of books in print on the back cover. There is no mention of a booklet titled, *God’s Reign of Grace* as being available for purchase as of July, 1937. In April, 1938, J. C. O’Hair published a booklet titled, *The Dispensational Razzle-Dazzle*. On the inside of the back cover of this clearly dated booklet, O’Hair advertises *God’s Reign of Grace* as one of the newest available titles for purchase. An inspection of the list of available booklets on the back cover of *God’s Reign of Grace* reveals that *The Dispensational Razzle-Dazzle* is not one of the three newest books in print. This of course means that *God’s Reign of Grace* was published during a roughly nine month window between the final issue of *Bible Study for Bereans* (July, 1937) and *The Dispensational Razzle-Dazzle* (April, 1938).
- The *Grace History Project* believes that *God’s Reign of Grace* contains the first clear Mid-Acts statements available in print. This of course means that sometime between July, 1937 and April, 1938 Pastor O’Hair finally came to a definitive position on when the body of Christ began.
- On pages four and five O’Hair is clear that the body of Christ did not begin on the day of Pentecost.
  - “God’s Bible teachers and spiritual leaders have been blinded long enough in teaching that Israel had been set aside and the dispensation of the grace of God ushered in “when the day of Pentecost was fully come.” Acts 2:1. The great majority of these teachers have taught that “the dispensation of the mystery” began on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came in fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy concerning Israel and Israel’s last days. Israel had not been cast away on the day of Pentecost and the reconciling of the Gentiles was not yet a reality in Acts 5:30 and 31. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.” “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” Acts 5:31. Where did the Gentiles come in? They did not come in. Israel had not yet been cast out. “The dispensation of the grace of God” (Ephesians 3:1 to 3) had not yet been committed to Paul who at that time was an enemy of the grace of God and the Lord Jesus

Christ. On the day of Pentecost the Twelve assured all the house of Israel of the Lordship and Messiahship of Jesus. Acts 2:36. “Ye men of Israel.” Acts 2:22. Acts 3:12. “Men, brethren and fathers.” Acts 7:2.”

- In the same section of the booklet O’Hair states that to begin the body of Christ before Acts 13:46 is to “greatly err and not know the Scriptures.”
  - “To begin the dispensation of the grace of God of Ephesians 3:1 to 3 before Acts 13:46 is to greatly err and not know the Scriptures. The first intimation in the Book of Acts of the casting away of Israel and the reconciling of the Gentiles, is the “dispensational” miracle in the experience of Bar-Jesus, Saul, and Sergius Paulus. God sent the judgment of temporary blindness upon Bar Jesus (meaning child of Jehovah Saviour) and note what followed concerning Paulus: “Then the deputy when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” Acts 13:12.

This by miracle and precept foretells the truth of Romans 11:7 and 8 and 11:25 and 11:30.

Romans 11:7 and 8: “What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.”

Romans 11:25: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.”

Romans 11:30: “For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief.”

This then inaugurated the dispensation of the grace of God, the fall of Israel, and the riches of the world, the diminishing of Israel and the riches of the Gentiles. Romans 11:12.”

- Later, on page nine, O’Hair teaches that God sent blindness upon Israel in Romans 11:8.
  - “God Himself sent blindness upon Israel. Romans 11:8. Acts 28:25 to 28. But this was not done until some years after Pentecost, after Paul had preached to them. The casting away of Israel, according to Romans 11:12 and 11:15, brought the reconciliation ministry of II Corinthians 5:16 to 21: “Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them: and hath committed unto us the word of

reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. II Corinthians 5:16 to 21."

- In a section titled, "The Reign of Grace During and After the "Acts" Period," O'Hair outlines the difference between Paul's Acts and Post-Acts ministry.
  - "From the Roman prison Paul wrote as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles." Ephesians 3:1. The expression, "the dispensation of the grace of God" is used by Paul, for the first time, in Ephesians 3:2, about 64 or 65 A. D. There are today some messengers of the grace of God who teach that "the dispensation of the grace of God", "the dispensation of the mystery" (Ephesians 3:9), and even the Church which is Christ's Body, did not begin until after Paul became the prisoner of the Lord in Rome. The transfer of administration of the mystery from Israel to Gentiles did not begin during the Acts period. That there was a change in God's spiritual program for members of the Body of Christ after the close of "Acts", should be obvious to any careful spiritual student of the Scriptures. There is, in Paul's "Post-Acts" Epistles a marked absence of the signs and the sign-gifts found in his "Acts" ministry and His "Acts period" Epistles. But a new program does not mean a new and different Body. The Body of Romans 12:3 to 6 is the Body of Ephesians.

During the "Acts" period God's order was "to the Jews only", in Acts 1 to 9; "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" from Acts 13; and after the close of Acts no longer, "to the Jew first." However, in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians the statement, "for by grace ARE ye saved through faith—not of yourselves—not of works" should read, "for by grace WERE ye . . ." In other words, the Ephesians, or most of them, addressed by Paul, were saved during the "Acts" period and not thereafter, although some of them might have been saved after Acts 28:31. These believing sinners had been sealed by the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption before the close of "Acts". Ephesians 1:13 and 14 and 4:30. The Divine baptism of Romans 6:3 is the same as the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5 and Colossians 2:12."

- On pages fourteen through sixteen in a section titled, "Dispensation—Ultradispensationalism" O'Hair argues that Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians all teach the message of Ephesians 2:8-9 i.e., justification by grace through faith apart from the works of the law.
  - "The Epistle to the Romans was written during the "Acts" period, as was also the Epistle to the Galatians. Surely the message of grace, without religion or law, is clearly presented in these Epistles. The student of God's Word, who has studied the Epistle to the Galatians, knows that that Epistle is the refutation of the foolish argument of some that, by God's orders, Israel's ritualism, or religion, was included in God's "grace" program for Gentiles during the "Acts" period. . .

In Galatians 3:17 to 19, the believer is taught that the justified Gentile had nothing to do with Israel's religion or reign of law. The Gentile believer was declared righteous by

grace, by faith, without religion and without works, during the “Acts” period. Surely we have nothing better today. Moreover, the ministry of reconciliation committed to believers in II Corinthians 5:17 to 21, is the same ministry of reconciliation as in Colossians 1:20, and the very same that is committed unto us today. Those Corinthian sinners who accepted the reconciliation, were made the righteousness of God because Christ on the cross was made sin. II Corinthians 5:21. They became members of the same Body of which believers are today members. . .

To make Paul’s “Acts” Epistles messages to an Israelitish kingdom church and his prison Epistles to a non-covenant, non-Israelitish different church is to corrupt the Word of God.

Our task of rightly dividing the Word of truth, or distinguishing between things that differ, is difficult enough without inventing or imagining some differences which do not exist. The “grace” message of Romans and Galatians is the “grace” message of Ephesians. The “reconciliation” message of II Corinthians is the “reconciliation” message of Colossians. The Philippian saints of Philippians 1:5 and 6 were in the same Body as were the Philippian saints, of Acts 16:14 to 31, some sixteen years before. . .

Before Acts 13:2, Paul preached the faith which he had destroyed as a Jew, Saul of Tarsus. Galatians 1:23. When Paul received and first preached the gospel of uncircumcision (Galatians 2:7 to 9), we may not be able to state positively. But we can state, with absolute surety, that Paul, in preaching the uncircumcision gospel, in proclaiming his Christ-given message of reconciliation, was not continuing with the same ministry and message which the Lord had given to Peter to proclaim. What folly to teach that Paul received the revelation of the mystery on the road to Damascus.

Whatever may have been the change in God’s program, after Acts 28:31, it was not a change as to the saving message of grace. The cessation of signs did not mean either the interruption of covenants or a switch from the “grace” message to a better “grace” message, or a transfer from an Israelitish Church to a new Church.”

- On page nineteen we find our first clear mid-Acts statement. It is here that O’Hair argues that a dispensational change took place between Acts 5:30 and Ephesians 1:19 to 22. Israel was set aside according to Romans 11:15 paving the way for Paul’s ministry of reconciliation outlined in I Corinthians 5:16 to 21, according to O’Hair. Therefore, the body of Christ began before Paul wrote I Corinthians.
  - “When we acknowledge that there is a great difference between Christ exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance to Israel and Christ above all principalities in the heavens, Head of the Church which is His Body, this question must follow: “did a dispensational change take place between Acts 5:30 and Ephesians 1:19 to 22?” The answer must be an emphatic “Yes”.

It is absurd to say that Israel had been set aside when Peter proclaimed the message of Acts 5:30 and 31. It is also equally absurd to say that Israel had not been set aside when Paul wrote Ephesians. Therefore, Israel was set aside some time between the time these two messages were given. The casting away of Israel brought the reconciling of the Gentiles. Romans 11:15. This reconciliation ministry is proclaimed in II Corinthians 5:16 to 21. Therefore Israel had been cast away before that Epistle was written. Although the final doom was not pronounced until Acts 28:25 to 28.”

- Ultimately, Pastor O’Hair teaches that divine judgment fell upon Israel between the day of Pentecost and the year Romans was written. In short, the body of Christ began during the Acts period before the year Paul wrote Romans.
  - “The Book of Romans has been called the message of ruin, redemption and righteousness. We might add retribution, reconciliation, resurrection and reward.

The disgraceful ruin of the Gentiles, without the law, is recorded in the first chapter of Romans, and the utter failure of the Jew, under the law, in the second and third chapters. In spite of the advantage of the Jew, God’s chosen people, to whom was committed the oracles of God, and to whom was given the service of God (Romans 3:1 and 2; Romans 9:4 to 6) so far as sin is concerned; “There is no difference”, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” The Gentiles came short of the glory of God revealed in creation. The Jews came short of the glory revealed at Sinai. Romans 3:22 and 23. Again in redemption: “There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.” Romans 10:12.

While Christ was on earth there was a difference between the Jew and the Gentile. Matthew 15:21 to 27. From Pentecost and for some years thereafter there was a difference. Acts 10:28, Acts 13:46, Acts 11:1 to 3. But about seven years after Pentecost Peter learned his lesson. “God . . . put no difference between us and them.” Acts 15:9. But for some years after that the Jews had some priority rights and some special religious privileges. Romans 1:16, Acts 18:6, Acts 21:24.

Romans tells the story of the casting-away of Israel by God. It first tells the story of the casting-away of the Gentiles by God. We quote part of these two stories:

“Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.” “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections.” “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.” Romans 1:24, 1:26 to 28. “God gave them up”—“God gave them over.” This is what happened to the nations. God cast them away.

Now let us note what happened to Israel. “God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; unto this day.” Romans

11:8. “Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.” Romans 11:10. “For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” Romans 11:15. “For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee.” Romans 11:21. This awful Divine judgment fell upon Israel sometime between the day of Pentecost and the year Romans was written.

With all Gentiles under the condemnation of God, alienated from the life of God, dead in trespasses and sins, and with God’s favored Nation smitten by God with a judgment of spiritual blindness, and cast away, what course was left for God to pursue?

. . . But God’s blindness sent upon Israel brought in the period and reign of grace. With God’s favored Nation out of the way, and the Gentiles aliens and enemies, what happened: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us Together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:4 to 6.

There was nothing left for God to do but to destroy the entire human race or bring in an age of unrestricted, unlimited grace. God threw down the bars and removed every obstacle except Satan and man’s rebellious will, and sent His servants out with II Corinthians 5:19 to 21: “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

God was angry with the house of Israel once before and cast them out of His sight.

“Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.” II Kings 17:18. He also became very angry with the house of Judah and sent them into captivity for seventy years. “For through the anger of the Lord it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.” II Kings 24:20 and Jeremiah 52:3.

God had mercy on Judah and brought His people back to their land and gave them another chance. God sent them His Son. What did they do?

“But last of all He sent them His Son, saying, They will reverence my Son. But when the husbandmen saw the Son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill Him, and let us seize on His inheritance.” Matthew 21:37 and 38.

Again God gave them another chance. Acts 3:19 to 21, Acts 5:30 and 31, Acts 7:51 to 60. But they again rejected and killed another messenger of the risen Messiah (Stephen).

In spite of all of this, and because the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (Romans 11:25 to 30), God will again have great mercy upon Israel and gather them to Himself, and for Himself, and for His own glory.

“I will also save you from all your uncleannesses; and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you; be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord God; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded.” Ezekiel 36:29, 32, 33. In the meantime the Gentiles are in the place of special favor. God offers them full pardon, free salvation without reputation, merit, religion, or endeavor, or striving. “The free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:23.

But hear God’s warning:

“For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness; otherwise thou shalt be cut off.” Romans 11:21 and 22.

Politically and spiritually we are today in “the times of the Gentiles” in a signless period of grace wherein religion has no place. The gospel of the kingdom will again be proclaimed by God’s servants after this present dispensation has been ended by God.”

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